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ABSTRACT

The 1933-42 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) continues to generate interest, indicated by efforts to create a new national program and by successful state programs in California and Ohio. The CCC initially inducted unemployed, unmarried men, aged 18-25, later inducted older men and Native Americans. CCC requirements included vocational education to improve employability after CCC service. The California Conservation Corps (CalCC) was established in 1976 to do conservation work and provide employment and training opportunities for California men and women, aged 18-23. CalCC (motto: "Hard work, low pay, miserable conditions") requires strenuous work on conservation projects and a 1-year educational regime in a residential camp, including reading classes, other academic subjects, vocational training, job-seeking skills, safety/health education, crafts, and recreation. CalCC has a favorable cost/benefit ratio and promotes attitude change, educational benefits, and work experience. The Ohio Division of Civilian Conservation (ODCC), primarily a non-residential work program, began in 1978 to provide employment, marketable skills, experience, and work habits for Ohio men and women, aged 16-23, and to accomplish conservation work. ODCC works largely for the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, is less regimented than other programs, and makes less effort to help corpsmembers find employment, but does state work in a cost-effective manner. (MH)

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Abstract

The successful Civilian Conservation Corps program of the depression years continues to generate interest. Indicators of this interest are found in efforts to create a new national program and successful state programs, such as those in California and Ohio. The purpose and methods of the original CCC and the programs of these two states are similar, as are their results. This descriptive article contains a description of these three programs and is excerpted from a feasibility study commissioned by the State of Florida.

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Is The World Any Different Because You Were There?

The increasing pressures placed upon our nation's natural resources combined with the escalating costs of their protection continue to be topics of public concern. As a result, the demands related to their access and preservation are rapidly increasing. Trade-offs are more frequently being considered in a climate of political expediency and economic urgency. National and local governments are faced with rapidly increasing costs of providing for essential public services while demands for public monies to support programs and services are outstripping limited revenues. This dilemma is making it less likely that governments, especially at local levels, will be able to meet real needs for community resource preservation and development or to offset the pressures of competing special interest groups. The crunch of conflicting and unsolvable demands will inevitably continue to impact adversely on local and national economies and the quality of life.

Certainly the strain on available beaches, rivers, fresh water supplies, forests, and parks is of major concern; but of no less concern is the utilization of vital human resources. Increasing rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, suicide, crime, and unemployment among young adults are reaching epidemic proportions. There has been too little success in alleviating these problems and, even if it were still possible in these times of budgetary cutbacks, throwing money at such difficulties has not been sufficiently productive.

In an effort to find a cost effective means of performing critical labor in natural and community resource development and preservation, while providing meaningful employment for young adults, several states are turning with interest to a program that dealt with similar problems in another time fraught with economic and personal hardship. This program, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), achieved dramatic successes in meeting some of the difficulties of the depression years. Recently there have been several seasonal programs (Youth Conservation Corps and Young Adult Conservation Corps) which have been only partially modeled after the CCCs; but two states, California and Ohio, have had success in conducting programs more closely patterned after their popular depression era progenitor. In light of these successes, and an increasingly evident need, other states are taking a closer look and a parallel movement for a new national CCC continues to attract support.

> It has been demonstrated repeatedly that minimum-wage youth crews can pay for themselves in conservation work performed, and that they are the least-cost means of providing needed labor-intensive services. Moreover, many young men and women in the Corps will be removed from welfare roles and will gain basic work habits and training for regular employment. . . .The (California) CCC has proved thousands of young women and men are willing to work for more than just a paycheck. In a nation of dwindling resources and high unemployment, we cannot afford to ignore the common solutions of a residential youth conservation program based on the work ethic (Collins, 1980).

Faced with growing population and increasing strain on its fragile natural resources, Florida has shown an interest in starting a state conservation corps. The State's Department of Natural Resources commissioned a study to investigate both the California and the Ohio programs and to describe how a Florida program might be structured. During the fall of 1981, I visited both state programs to collect data and impressions for this study. This article contains some of the results (Griffin, 1981) of these visits. But first, I feel that it is important to look at the federal program that fathered these later efforts.

Civilian Conservation Corps

The stock market crash of 1929 signaled the beginning of the "great depression," an economic catastrophy which was to traumatize the nation until World War II. By 1932 business was at a standstill and millions were left jobless, unemployment reaching 25%. Intensifying the national tragedy, several years of alternate draught and flood, on top of generations of poor resource management and overuse, devastated much of the nation. Henry Wallace, later to serve as Vice President, stated that:

> Thoughtlessly we have destroyed or wounded a considerable part of our common wealth in this country. We have ripped open and to some extent devitalized more than half of all the land in the United States. We have slashed down forests and loosed floods upon ourselves. We have torn up grasslands and left the earth to blow away. We have shallowed and befouled our creeks, rivers, and other living waters (Cohen, 1980, p. 88).

On March 9, 1933, five days after his inaugural, President Roosevelt called six cabinet members and other officials to the White House and placed before them a plan for a Civilian Conservation Corps (Newsweek, April 14, 1941, p. 23). This program involved marshaling the manpower being wasted by millions of young, unemployed men and utilizing them to deal with problems in conservation and natural resources. In a subsequent message to Congress, Roosevelt said that:

> I propose to create a Civilian Conservation Corps to be used in simple work, not interfering with normal employment, and confining itself to forestry, the preservation of soil erosion, flood control, and similar projects.
>
> More important, however, than the material gains, will be the moral and spiritual value of such work. The overwhelming majority of unemployed Americans, who are now walking the streets and receiving private or public relief, would infinitely prefer to work. We can take a vast army of these unemployed out into healthful surroundings. We can eliminate to some extent at least the threat that enforced idleness brings to spiritual and moral stability (Congressional Record, March 21, 1933, p. 650).

On the same day he signed the bill authorizing the CCC, the President issued an executive order which:

*Appointed Robert Fechner, head of the Machinists Union, as Director. This appointment served to reduce objections from organized labor.

*Directed the Secretaries of War, Interior, and Agriculture to designate a representative to serve on an advisory council.

*Assigned the task of selecting enrollees to the Department of Labor.

*Assigned the job of planning and supervising work programs to the Department of Agriculture.

*Gave the War Department the responsibility of paying, housing, clothing, feeding, and providing medical care for the enrollees.

The first man was selected two days after the executive order. Ten days later the first camp was set up in George Washington National Forest, Virginia (Roseman, 11, 109). Initially, the Corps inducted 250,000 unemployed, unmarried adults between the ages of 18 and 25. They came from families on relief. In April, 1933, 14,000 native Americans and 24,000 older men with special skills needed by the Corps, were inducted. In May, under pressure from veterans' groups, an additional 24,000 World War I veterans were also inducted.

Specifically, the purpose of the CCC was to:

*Give employment to young men who, because of abnormal economic conditions, were unable to find jobs through ordinary means.

*Provide assistance for families dependent upon public relief.

*Begin a sound, nationwide conservation program.

*Stimulate the nation's economy through program expenditures. (McKinney, 1935, p. 253)

In the process of meeting the intended economic and social goals, the Corps conducted more than 150 types of activities. These included:

*laying public telephone lines;

*developing public campgrounds and parks;

*building trails, roads, and bridges;

*restoring historic areas;

*re-vegetating ranges and planting trees;

*restoring and cleaning streams and stocking fish;

*building fire towers;

*fighting forest fires and providing disaster relief.
(Cohen, 1980, p. 88-95)

Corpsmen enrolled for a six-month enlistment with options to re-enlist for periods of up to two years, depending on performance. Upon enlistment they received a physical examination, were issued uniforms, and attended a conditioning and screening period at a central training facility.

The enrollee, in return for working a 40-hour week, received $30 a month, 22 of which had to be sent to their families. Enrollees who became leaders received an additional $45. Corpsmen were also given food, housing, medical care, and certain educational and recreational opportunities (McKinney, 1936, p. 254).

A typical camp contained a mess hall, barracks, school building, recreational building, infirmary, and supplemental buildings. Each camp had approximately 200 enrollees, two or three Army officers, a surgeon, a project superintendent, an educational advisor, and eight to ten foremen. Although the Army officers were in charge of the camps, their jurisdiction did not extend to the work projects. These were under the project superintendent, who assumed responsibility for the work day and was, in turn, responsible to the Department of Agriculture (Cohen, 1980, p. 45-47).

Life in a CCC camp was very regimented. Reveille was at 6 a.m.; work was from 7:15 a.m. to 4 p.m. with 30 minutes for lunch; the flag was lowered and quarters inspected before supper. The evenings were spent in educational and recreational activities (Cohen, 1980, p. 45-47).

Many of the corpsmen were school dropouts and illiteracy was common. Many had no previous vocational training or employable skills. By the end of 1933, it became obvious that training was needed to improve employability after the Corps and to better utilize free time, thereby reducing disciplinary problems. Thus vocational training became the most important part of the educational program (Cohen, 1980, p. 132-133).

The CCCs reached their peak in 1935, enrolling 502,000 that year in 2,514 camps. During their nine year duration, a total of 3,465,766 enrollees and 263,755 staff participated in a total of 4,500 camps (Cohen, 1980).

But the CCCs were not without problems. From the beginning the program was considered as a relief agency. Permanent status was repeatedly denied by Congress and they were forced to operate on a series of extensions. This caused the Corps to vary in size at the whim of each extension. The most severe problem the Corps faced was the impediments of governmental politics and intra-governmental rivalries. Other agencies repeatedly attempted to gain control over elements of the program in power struggles.

Internal problems also troubled the Corps. Desertion rates increased with time; corpsmembers occasionally rebelled; and the later induction of minors caused management and personnel problems.

These difficulties were to be expected from a program of this magnitude, but the mortal blow came from the nation's entry to World War II. National mobilization reduced the unemployment rate to a negligible figure and the nation's attention turned away from conservation to the immediately more important demands of the war effort. By 1942 the factors that spawned the CCCs were either no longer present or were no

longer considered to be important enough to justify its continued existence (Cohen, 1980).

In the short life of the CCCs, their accomplishments were truly impressive. During its existence the Corps worked in virtually every national and state forest and park. Private lands, forests, and farms profited from their projects. Two and a half billion trees were planted; 23 million acres of land benefited from soil erosion control work; 17 million acres of land received drainage improvement; 89,000 miles of telephone lines were strung; 125,000 miles of truck trails were constructed; 12 million man-days were expended in fighting forest fires; and 800 parks were developed (Cohen, 1980). But, perhaps the Corps' greatest contribution was to be found in the lives of the men who had been rescued from the ravages of economic depression. The education and training they received better prepared them to serve themselves and their nation, and helped restore the nation's faith in the future.

California Conservation Corps

The California Conservation Corps was established in 1976 to accomplish conservation work within the State and to provide employment and training opportunities to the State's young men and women. The program operates as an independent agency but works in cooperation with the Division of State Forestry. The enabling legislation was given urgency to allow the Corps to impact upon the State's high unemployment rate. To accomplish this, the legislature established the following goals (Joint Legislative Audit Committee, California, 1978):

*Accomplish useful and needed public works projects that will protect, develop, and maintain the natural environment.

*Maintain fire prevention and suppression capabilities in rural areas.

*Provide on-the-job training so that corpsmembers may acquire employable skills, experience, and knowledge.

*Instill in corpsmembers an appreciation and understanding of the natural environment.

It has often been said that the social conditions which allowed the original CCCs to successfully structure a rigid living and work environment no longer exist. The work ethic has weakened; the impact of mass joblessness is no longer appreciated; the frontier spirit is fading ever further into our past; working conditions and individual rights are of increasing concern. Young adults today are not thought to be attracted to regimentation, discipline, hard work, and minimal compensation.

In view of this, it is surprising that the California Corps has closely followed the structure, goals, and philosophy of the original federal CCCs. And, it appears to be having success. Large numbers of young adults continue to apply.

California residents, ages 18 to 23 may apply for enrollment in the program. Applicants must be willing to follow a strict, strenuous schedule of work and a mandatory educational regimen for one year in a residential center. The State maintains two inner-city, non-residential centers, but the remaining centers (about ten) are residential and the program's foundation is based on its residential camps. Corpsmembers are paid a minimum wage and are charged back for their meals and lodging.

Enrollees are initially assigned to a central training facility for orientation, indoctrination, and training. They are then reassigned to a work center which serves as their home, work site, base camp, educational facility, and recreational center. Daily, they rise at 5 a.m. and undergo a period of calisthenics and a two-mile run before breakfast. They are then assigned to work projects for an eight-hour day with a 30-minute lunch break. After work, they spend their evenings in mandatory educational and recreational activities.

The work projects are similar to those undertaken by the original CCCs and include:

*emergency and disaster relief, flood control, and forest fire fighting;

*fish and wildlife habitat enhancement;

*forest improvement and re-vegetation, trail development, timber harvesting, and mill operation;

*parks and recreation facility development and historical site rehabilitation;

*solar energy projects and construction for local municipalities.

About 225 corpsmembers per year are selected to participate in second year leadership or skills programs. Those selected return to the training center for additional instruction then are returned to their work centers where they provide first level supervision and assist in center support. This reduces the need for large numbers of permanent staff and enhances the participants' future employability.

The educational program typically consists of reading classes for corpsmembers unable to read at a sixth grade level, various other academic subjects, vocational training, job seeking skills, safety and health education, crafts, and recreation. Local resources such as public schools, community colleges, and retired teachers and craftsmen are utilized. Work center construction, maintenance, and repair are done by the corpsmembers themselves.

The program reports a favorable cost/benefit ratio for its projects. An analysis for the state legislature reported a 20% return on investments; for every dollar spent on the program, $1.20 in benefits were obtained (Report to Legislature, California 1976-79). But there seems to be other less tangible benefits that can not be costed out. The program appears to provide many benefits in attitude change, educational benefits, and work experience to participants.

Like the federal CCC, the California Corps maintains a lower age limit of 18. Experiments with lower ages in both programs were unsuccessful due to problems associated with the lesser maturity levels (Cohen, 1980, p. 145). The California staff interviewed also reported problems with mixes of minors and adults, greater attrition rates among minors, and greater governmental restrictions on work done by minors when admitting lower ages. One director stated that, "the best program for minors is school. That's where our efforts should be, not in putting them into camps!"

Reflecting the changes in society since 1932, California and Ohio include both sexes in their programs. Staff in both states were virtually unanimous in stating that females make excellent corpsmembers. They work harder, have better attitudes, are better leaders, and tend to pace themselves better. California makes no discrimination in assigning sexes to work--disregarding work difficulty. As an example, females are included in fire fighting crews and on heavy construction. In both states, about 30% of the enrollees are female. California administrators report that discrimination and sex related problems increase rapidly as the number of females drops below 30%. Above that figure, problems seem to closely approximate what is found in society as a whole.

The California Conservation Corps' motto, "Hard work, low pay, miserable conditions," speaks for itself. They seem to work hard and fast, and appear to be very proud of themselves, their organization, and their accomplishments. Interviews with private individuals outside the Corps and employers of ex-corpsmembers seem to indicate there is a feeling that the program provides the State with a valuable service otherwise not available.

Ohio Division of Civilian Conservation

The Ohio program became operational in April, 1978, and operates as a division of the Department of Natural Resources. Their organization is more closely modeled after a civil service forestry agency. Program goals are to:

*Provide gainful employment for 16 to 23 year olds of all economic, ethnic, and racial classifications.

*Provide participants with the opportunity to acquire and develop marketable skills, training, education, experience, and work habits.

*Accomplish needed conservation work.

Enrollees are enlisted for a one-year contract at minimum wage. Incentive pay increases may be granted corpsmembers selected for leadership roles.

Ohio maintains no central training facility so all screening and training is accomplished by individual work centers. There is no mandatory educational or after-hours component; however, residential sites offer voluntary programs which, reportedly, attract 2 to 20 percent of the corpsmembers. Each residential center provides a comprehensive assortment of recreational facilities such as television, gymnasiums, and game rooms.

The Ohio CCs are primarily a non-residential work program. They maintain only two residential centers, so those without regular centers in their area can participate. But most of their centers are non-residential and are located in rural areas.

The program involves itself almost exclusively in projects generated by and supporting the Department of Natural Resources and its various divisions. In so doing, it serves as a work branch of the DNR and almost all staff have been drawn from within the department. By contrast, California obtains its permanent staff from outside the civil service structure

and classifies them as exempt employees--allowing for more freedom to hire and fire than is enjoyed in Ohio, where civil service regulations apply.

Examples of Ohio projects include:

*bridge, small building, park, road, and trail construction;

*historical reconstruction and repair;

*range management, wildlife conservation, stream cleaning and straightening;

*logging, firewood cutting, and sawmill operation;

*fire and flood emergency work;

*support of DNR through sign making and maintenance of the DNR exhibit at the State fairgrounds.

Although 30% of the corpsmembers are female, there appears to be a reluctance to assign them to the more difficult, dirty, and demanding jobs. The majority seen were in clerical and support roles.

Ohio maintains a looser control over corpsmembers than does California, or did the original CCC (especially outside actual work times). Corpsmembers in Ohio seem to look upon their work more as a job than as a commitment. This may be partially perpetuated by the lack of a planned and mandatory after-work program. In California, even enrollees at the non-residential centers follow the same excercise procedures before work and educational programs after. An interviewed California administrator stated that, "the difference between good and poor centers is in the dedication. . .to the educational element." Another director stated that, "we don't pretend to be anything but a work ethic program, but we must recognize the need to work with the 5 p.m. to 9 a.m. corpsmember or the program will

get into trouble. The centers must deal with the whole corpsmember." A third director stated, "as we moved to a more structured educational spare time program, attrition dropped and disciplinary problems decreased." The effects of a dedication to the whole corpsmember and to improving their situation during and after the program is evident in California's lower reported attrition rate and fewer disciplinary problems.

Ohio's residential centers are relatively luxurious, compared to California or the original CCCs, and contain an array of recreational opportunities to occupy idle employees as well as housing them in two-person rooms. In contrast, California centers are more spartan (i.e., an ex-prison road camp) with few recreational opportunities and dormitories of six or more. But, there the corpsmember has little time to enjoy what might be present.

Also, unlike California, which maintains an active job-finding assistance program, there is little evidence in Ohio of an effort to assist corpsmembers in finding employment.

Ohio's goals and emphasis are similar to the other programs, but their operational philosophy appears to be different from the other programs' more holistic approach to improve the enrollee through a comprehensive (and mandatory) involvement. But, despite their differences, Ohio appears to be accomplishing much needed work in a cost effective manner and is providing an appreciated service to the State.

The three programs studied represent a great deal of experience in the operation of a conservation corps. In each case, valuable services are being (or have been) provided--to the public and to the corpsmembers

involved. The public has benefited through the better use and treatment of valuable resources, improved public works, and disaster assistance. The corpsmembers have benefited through job assistance and personal development, making them more valuable citizens.

> And it's that sense of accomplishment, because see, in an effort to be good to our kids, we have failed to demand anything of them. Nobody in this society says you will be responsible for the consequences of your actions! No one says you owe it to your country, to your state, to future generations! And, when I tell my kids that, in the beginning, I say I will never thank you. I will say a nice word to you because you owe it to future generations to preserve what we have left because somebody did it for you. You know, I take people from a society. . .that has 60 to 70 percent single parents, one of the highest teenage suicide rates, an abundance of drugs and alcohol, and I put 'em in a situation where some of my center directors say, "you're a minute late, good-bye!" All right? You got to get up at 5:30; you got to run two miles; you got to work all day; then you got to go to classes at night; you got to register to vote; you got to register for the draft; you got to give blood; and you got to learn to read and write to the sixth grade level or I'll fire you. . . .So, who knows? The year 2000 I'll have 25,000 graduates.

They'll be my age. They could have an affect upon society, because, what's the most important thing in life? Not the fanciest car! Not the best dope! Not the foxiest lady! . . .Not the neatest house! It's, is the world any different because you were there? . . .And you don't have to realize it now. You can realize it 20, 30 years from now! Is the world any different because you were there? (B. T. Collins, Director, California Conservation Corps, NBC Magazine, 1981)

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